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SIPDIS

FOR I/FW, B/G, IIP/G/NEA-SA, B/VOA/N (BANGLA SERVICE) STATE  
FOR SA/PAB, SA/PPD (LSCENSNY, SSTRYKER), SA/RA, INR/R/MR,  
AND PASS TO USAID FOR ANE/ASIA/SA/B (WJOHNSON)

CINCPAC FOR PUBLIC DIPLOMACY ADVISOR, J51 (MAJ TURNER), J45  
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TAGS: [KMDR](#) [OIIP](#) [OPRC](#) [KPAO](#) [PREL](#) [ETRD](#) [PTER](#) [ASEC](#) [BG](#) [OCII](#)

SUBJECT: Media Reaction: Middle East Summit, Iraq; Dhaka

Summary: Following the Middle East summit, newspapers  
express optimism about a permanent peace in the region.

English "Daily Star" terms the multiparty election in Iraq  
as positive and urges the U.S. not to withdraw in haste.

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[1](#)1. MIDDLE EAST SUMMIT  
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"Mahmoud Abbas' Leadership"  
Independent English language weekly "Holiday" editorially  
comments (2/11):  
The deal struck by Mahmoud Abbas and Ariel Sharon in Sharm  
el Sheikh last week should ignite some kind of cheer in  
those who have regularly wished the Middle East well. The  
ceasefire which, as the two leaders tell us, is one of those  
bits of good news which comes but rarely to the region. It  
has especially been in the last three years that the  
intensity of the conflict has defied any logic, leading  
there to a stalemate that only ended with the death of  
Yasser Arafat.

Mr. Abbas will need to demonstrate to his fellow  
Palestinians that he can be as tough as Mr. Arafat was in  
the struggle for a free Palestine. That means people in the  
region and around the world will watch how he goes about  
dealing with the question of Palestinians' right of return  
to their homes in the pre-1948 situation existing before the  
creation of Israel.

Mahmoud Abbas may be acceptable to Ariel Sharon and George  
[1](#)W. Bush. It is on whether or not his own people accept his  
way of upholding their cause that his political future will  
depend.

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"The Israeli-Palestinians Peace Process"  
Conservative Bangla language newspaper "Ittefaq" editorially  
comments (2/12):

International observers term the declaration to end  
hostilities as significant progress in the Middle East peace  
process . . . The attitude of Washington and Israel toward  
Mahmoud Abbas is positive. Abbas is himself known as a  
supporter of the Roadmap. After taking over the leadership,  
he initiated talks with Palestinian extremist groups. It is  
also significant that the Sharm el Sheikh summit included  
 Hamas and other extremist groups.

The historic value of the declaration is undeniable. There  
cannot be any meaningful peace talks in the atmosphere of  
conflict. It is a major achievement that all sides agreed to  
maintain the peaceful status quo.

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[1](#)2. Iraq  
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"Iraq: Election Is Just The first Step"  
An editorial page article in independent English language  
newspaper "Daily Star" opines (2/12):

The U.S. administration has to be careful that they are not  
tempted into identifying Iraqi legitimacy with unchecked  
Shia rule. They have to remember about the multi-ethnicity  
of Iraq, the tribal structures and the divide among  
religious denominations.

Iraq's election has opened another page in the history of  
the Middle East. There has been multi-party election. That  
is positive.

However, the challenge comes now. The mechanical part has  
partially completed. A lot remains to be done nevertheless  
in the context of creating institutions. Security and  
eventual stability will require dialogue with the Sunni  
leadership. This is an important factor that cannot be  
neglected. Only the first phase of a political evolution  
from military occupation to political legitimacy of sorts

has been completed.

The United Nations and other important powers need to help the Iraqis, more than ever, over the next two years. They have to create a sustainable, free Iraq, which can exist by itself. Failure to do this will mean an implosion, with radicals and fundamentalists creating more convulsions for the region.

The U.S. needs to withdraw but not in haste. A precipitous withdrawal based on domestic public opinion will now be seen as an abnegation of responsibility. It might instead create civil war and anarchy, worse than what we have seen in the Balkans.

Thomas